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ON PAGE A-4

NEW YORK TIMES
1 June 1984

Officials Say C.I.A. Made Mines With Navy Help

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 31 — The Central Intelligence Agency, with the help of a United States Navy laboratory, constructed the mines deployed recently against shipping in Nicaragua harbors. Administration officials said today.

This information seemed to contradict the implication of a statement by President Reagan three days ago in an interview with Irish television that the mines were "homemade."

From his statement it might have been inferred that the devices had been assembled by the so-called Contras, the Nicaraguan rebels backed by Washington who are seeking to topple the Sandinista Government.

A senior Administration official said Mr. Reagan might have interpreted the fact that the Central Intelligence Agency rather than the Navy was the principal maker of the rudimentary mines as meaning they were "homemade."

The officials said the C.I.A. Weapons Group made the mine casings from sewer pipes and stuffed them by hand with explosives. Fuses were apparently provided by the Mines Division of the Naval Surface Weapons Center at White Oak in Silver Springs, Md.

Navy Said to Test Prototype

The White Oak center was said to have provided certain technical advice, according to one official, and to have tested a prototype of the device,

according to another official.

The officials confirmed President Reagan's statement that the mines "couldn't sink a ship." He said they were designed mainly to damage and disable ships. According to other Government officials, the final assembly of the mines was performed by agency weapons specialists in Honduras.

The Central Intelligence Agency has refused to acknowledge involvement in covert operations against Nicaragua in general or the mining operation in particular.

Charges about the mining operation were first made by the Nicaraguan Government in mid-April after about a dozen ships had been damaged. After protests by legislators, and allied and friendly nations, to the effect that the mining was a violation of international law, Administration officials said the mining was halted.

U.S. Ship Operated Off Coast

As was disclosed several weeks ago, employees of the Central Intelligence Agency supervised what was called an elite corps of Central American commandos in laying the mines off Nicaragua's Pacific coast. The intelligence ship manned by Americans operated outside the 12-mile territorial limit recognized by the United States but well within the 300-mile boundary claimed by Nicaragua.

Mr. Reagan's Irish television interview was broadcast Tuesday evening and was, in good part, devoted to a defense of his Central American policies. He said that pressures against the Sandinista Government were justified because of its support of the Salvadoran guerrillas and called the mining operation "much ado about nothing."

"Those were homemade mines that couldn't sink a ship," he said.

It is not unusual for the agency to produce its own weapons and gadgets for special operations. Research and development laboratories of the military services are often involved in the process. Often the laboratory personnel involved in the manufacture or testing are not told the work is for the intelligence agency.

The Naval Surface Weapons Center at White Oak is under the Department of the Navy and consists of naval and civilian personnel. They do research, development, engineering and testing of both surface and underwater weapons systems. Among its many departments is a Mine Warfare Division.

Reagan Tells of Soviet Arms

Mr. Reagan also said in the Irish television interview that stepped-up American interdiction operations were in response to a "flood" of new arms shipments to Nicaragua by the Soviet Union and its allies.

Mr. Reagan said that there was a Bulgarian ship unloading tanks and armored personnel carriers as he spoke, and that this was the fifth Bulgarian shipment in the last 18 months.

Administration officials confirmed all this today and added that the Bulgarian ship just unloaded 41 tanks and about three dozen armored personnel vehicles. According to one of these officials, this last delivery about "doubles" the armored capabilities of the Nicaraguans compared with last year.

The House of Representatives recently voted to send \$61.75 million in emergency military aid to El Salvador, but rejected \$21 million in new money for covert operations by the Nicaraguan rebels or Contras. The Senate approved both programs and is set to decide next week how to react to the House action.

Warning of a Reagan Veto

Representative William S. Broomfield, Republican of Michigan, has said President Reagan will veto a bill that did not include money for the Nicaraguan rebels, even at the risk of losing aid for El Salvador.

The mining operation was said to have begun in late January or February. It entailed a mother ship manned by Americans sending off speed boats manned by Central Americans who did the actual mine laying.

At the time the operation was made public, a number of legislators asserted that the House and Senate intelligence committees had not been properly informed of it, as required by law. It was subsequently shown that William J. Casey, Director of Central Intelligence, had informed the committees, but only in a general way.

Officials said today that the method of making the mines was not discussed with Congress. Nor, they added, do committees usually get into such detailed matters.